

Monday, March 10, 2008
Regular Meeting of the CUSD

CUSD BOARD COMMENTS

Indignant Trustee Bryson exposes old guard corruption and incompetence

The following hard-hitting speech was delivered by reform Trustee Anna Bryson at the March 10, 2008 CUSD board meeting immediately following the pathetic, emotional and error-ridden speech read by Trustee Mike Darnold.

By Trustee Anna Bryson

I wish to speak. I will respond on behalf of the three of us seated here, Ellen Addonizio, Larry Christensen and I'm Anna Bryson.

I dislike having the integrity of the three of us impugned, when we have sacrificed a great deal in order to bring the first budget in the black to this community, to this board. In six years...five of the prior six years before we were elected, the budgets were in the red, which means that this board was not doing their taxpayers fiscal oversight.

This was brought up, I believe three meetings ago, in January, when Miss Draper, Trustee Draper told me that I was not telling the truth about the circumstances of the reserves of this district, at which point I called upon Sherry Hahn, our chief financial officer, who stated not only was I correct, but it was even more grave than I had stated. That it was presently at 2.2, not 2.4 at that point.

And this goes to the point of honesty. It goes to the point of money. Everyone up here has a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers of the Capistrano Unified School District. We are elected to educate children, but we are also elected to take care of what at that time was a six hundred eighty million dollar budget.

Most cities in this county have budgets of between twenty-five and thirty-five million dollars. This is an immense responsibility, which was totally ignored by the prior board for the entire time they sat here and OK'd every single thing that Superintendent Fleming said without a single "no" vote.

Do you not think that those millions that were lost in misspent monies would have been used better in the classrooms? Frankly, I'm outraged. To think

that the children here were deprived of tens and tens and tens of million of dollars that belonged to them, by the board.

I am a budget analyst. I've overhauled budgets in excess of 35 million dollars. And I looked at that budget the first time I walked in there in January after we were elected, and I was physically sick at what I saw. Not because Ms. Hahn hadn't done the best she could do, but because everything else from the top, from the superintendent, had been manipulated to cover up where the money was going.

Remember, Ms. Hahn had to take direction. OK? And a lot of good people in this building were directed improperly. And a lot of people nodded on this board and said, "yes, yes, yes," when they never asked where was the money going that belonged to the taxpayers of this area.

And it is intolerable to me to have someone say -- Ellen is a CPA, I'm a budget analyst, Larry is in construction -- that we do not have any knowledge. I've raised two daughters and have five grandchildren. I think I know a little bit about children and schools.

And frankly, the thing I know the most about the three of us, is that we know what the truth is and what it is not. And we will always disclose to you, with our wonderful new superintendent, Woodrow Carter, who came to us to a very difficult process, indeed. And I think we are very fortunate to have an honorable, solid administrator and decent character human being sitting in that seat.

But I will not tolerate anyone saying the three of us are rotated or done by rote. We listened to what the people told us when we were running for office. We won by 17%, and we have kept the faith with you. And that is -- you asked us to clean house in the financial arena here, and we are doing it. And we have done it, and it has been very difficult indeed.

We have faced nepotism. I was the first person to blow the whistle ten months ago that there were countless contractors whose bids were, for years...there was no competitive bidding. This was the United States of America and I was looking at a system that had no competitive bidding.

For years and years, oh, the same architect, and the same this and the same that. And no one questioned anything. No one questioned anything. And frankly, I have a question about an architect who didn't provide children with places to sit so they could eat without being rained on. I think that's a little bit odd. And there are a lot of other strange things. Mission Viejo was falling apart, that school over there, Newhart, when I went to see it.

Now we've taken care of a lot of things in this year. We've, we've turned the corner in the sense that, the first budget in the black, we have

competitive bidding, we have a new nepotism rule, we have a lot of things in place.

But it is intolerable to impugn the integrity of the three of us seated here.

We don't always agree, as you have witnessed, within ourselves. But every single day and hour, we are concerned with the honesty and the correct and the proper, and the totally transparent and the fiscally sound operation of this district so your children will have a decent education.

Click the link below to hear a recording of the comments by Trustee Mike Darnold and the response by Trustee Anna Bryson:

<http://thecapistranodispatch.com/uploads/audio/CUSD Board Dispute 3-10-08.mp3>